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SMALL FARM *digest*

VOLUME 3, NO. 2 - WINTER 2000

Marketing Through Farmer-Owned Cooperatives

COn November 6, 1999, President Clinton visited the Hermitage Tomato Cooperative in Hermitage, AR, praising it as a model for the type of public-private ventures he wants to create in economically distressed areas across the nation. The Nov.-Dec. 1999 issue of USDA's Rural Cooperatives magazine features an in-depth story about the President's tour of the cooperative.

"The Hermitage Cooperative is proof positive that a few innovative people - with some help from their government and a commitment from the private sector - can turn a community around and create a brighter future," Clinton said.

Before the 15 farmer members - some on the verge of bankruptcy - formed the co-op in 1996, they lacked the marketing clout and economies of scale to do business with big buyers. Backed by federal loan guarantees, the co-op now provides 100 jobs in Bradley County, AR, as a tomato supplier for Burger King.

Burger King's purchasing agent is negotiating to buy cucumbers for the food chain from the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, which assists limited-resource minority farmers in the Mississippi Delta.

Today's economic landscape is changing so rapidly that greater cooperation between small producers is essential to their economic survival. Rural Americans are drastically under-prepared to compete in international trade markets. As the agricultural sector faces increasing market pressures, small farmers and ranchers seek ways to add value to and retain a greater share of margins generated by their products, diversify income,



Randy Clanton (left), manager of the Hermitage (AR) Tomato Cooperative, escorted President Clinton, USDA Secretary Dan Glickman, and others on a tour of the co-op's packing plant recently.—USDA PHOTO BY R. ANSON EAGLIN.

2nd National Small Farm Conference Draws 700

"Small farms are at the very top of the USDA agenda," said Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman via video message at the opening session of the 2nd National Small Farm Conference.

Describing the challenges now facing American agriculture and dramatic changes in farm policy, he said, "I don't think we'll ever go back to the kind of farm policy that prevailed for most of the 20th century with the federal government managing the farm economy and controlling supply and demand.

"All of us will have to be more creative and innovative. We have to devise new ways for small farmers to manage risk, market their commodities, capitalize on technology, and protect natural resources.

"Farmers will have to be as entrepre-

neurial as ever. The rest of us - government, universities, the scientific community, and community-based organizations - must work together to empower our farmers, providing them with the tools they need to thrive."

Seven hundred key representatives of agencies and institutions that work closely with small farmers and ranchers attended the conference Oct. 12-15, 1999, in St. Louis, MO. Enthusiasm was high among participants, who included farmers, ranchers, small farm and ranch community leaders, extension specialists, outreach personnel, and representatives of federal, state, local agencies, and community-based organizations.

"This is a very crucial determining time for small farmers," affirmed USDA's Adela Backiel, Director of Sustainable Development and Small Farms. "Marketing innovation and partnerships are needed approaches and the new way of

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spread risks, and keep their communities economically vital.

"If small farms are going to survive, farmers have no choice but to work together cooperatively," says Shirley Sherrod, formerly with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives and now executive director of Community Alliances of Interdependent Agriculture, Inc.

Agricultural cooperatives - which help members gain market power through joint marketing, bargaining, processing, and purchasing supplies and services - may be one of the best options for small producers to add more value to their products and capture more income.

Co-op membership makes sense because not everyone can be a direct marketer. Success with roadside stands or farmers markets, for example, depends heavily on location and other factors.

"Small farmers cannot compete individually with larger growers, but by working together, sharing information, pooling resources, and adding value to production and marketing as a group, they can survive," says Randy Torgerson, deputy administrator of USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service.

The 100-year-old cooperative business structure is as American as President Franklin Roosevelt, who championed co-ops to bring needed services to rural America. Cooperatives have proven successful in agriculture. Today more than 4,000 agricultural co-ops operate in the U.S. with a total net income of nearly \$1.7 billion and net business volume of more than \$104.7 billion. Large and small, co-ops are important players in the global marketplace.

Yet many farmers and ranchers have not yet investigated or joined an agricultural co-op, perhaps because individualism, independence, and competitiveness are such deeply held American values. Americans also value helping and cooperating with each other, which is the foundation of the cooperative business concept. Would co-op membership benefit your farm or ranch business?

"Co-op" Defined. A co-op is a business that is owned and controlled by the

people who use its products, supplies, and/or services. Co-ops vary in purpose, are designed to meet specific member objectives, adapt to members' changing needs, and promote self-reliance and self-help among members.

Types of Co-ops. American co-op types are diverse but the most common types of agricultural co-ops are marketing, farm supply, or service co-ops.

Marketing co-ops arrange to assemble, pack, process, and sell members' products in domestic and foreign markets. Some widely known brand name foods - like Land O'Lakes, Welch, and Sunkist - originated in co-ops with small producer members and have become consumer franchises.

Bargaining associations, which work in processed fruit and vegetable industries, are also agricultural co-ops. Members sell directly to processors they choose and the bargaining co-op negotiates with each processor separately on behalf of the member.

Farm supply co-ops purchase in bulk services and products like fertilizers, fuel, feed, and crop protectants; obtain volume discounts; and pass savings for farm inputs on to members.

Service co-ops provide members with specialized services not economical for individuals to obtain, such as rural utilities, herd animal and horticultural advice, product transportation, integrated pest management, nut hulling facilities, or cotton gin use.

Machinery pools are used in countries abroad but are not yet widely adopted in the U.S. Producers cooperate to pool machine resources and share in the use of machines for field work and harvesting. Could this work in your community?

New generation co-ops. Co-op development is enjoying renewed interest in the United States. New generation co-ops, which integrate farm producers further up the agricultural marketing and food processing chain, are popular in the

Small Farm Digest is published three times a year by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Washington, DC 20250-2220.

The Secretary of Agriculture has determined that this periodical is necessary in the transaction of public business required by law.

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Readers wishing to contribute items to *Small Farm Digest* may send their submissions to Stephanie Dilson, Editor, *Small Farm Digest*, CSREES, USDA, Mail Stop 2220, 1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington DC 20250-2220 (telephone: 202/401-6544; fax: 202/401-5179; e-mail: solson@reeusda.gov). Unless otherwise stated, information in this publication is public property and may be reprinted without permission.

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Small Farm Digest is printed with soy-based ink on paper containing a minimum of 50 percent waste paper. *Small Farm Digest* is recyclable.

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SOME EXAMPLES OF CO-OPS THAT BENEFIT SMALL FARMERS AND RANCHERS INCLUDE:

■ Extension educators Jim Simms, Jennifer Thorn, and Dale Johnson helped establish Maryland's Mt. Pride Cooperative with 80 members in three states. The co-op successfully produces and markets USDA-inspected, vacuum-packed rabbit meat to health-conscious consumers through supermarket chain distribution in Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio. Members are traditional farmers and people who lost industry jobs and then entered farming with extension assistance.

■ The Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund (FSC/LAF) has helped limited-resource farmers in the South for more than 30 years. FSC/LAF helped Southern Alternatives, a group of African-American pecan and vegetable farmers in Georgia, to obtain funds to buy a nut cracking and processing plant. Now in its second year of operation, the group runs a mail-order pecan and pecan-candy business and sells vegetables to supermarkets and to limited-resource families through the Georgia Hunger Coalition.

■ With 10 farm families as members, Central Kentucky Hog Marketing Association is in its ninth year of business. "With only one slaughter plant left in Kentucky, we face real problems in marketing pigs," says Manager Tom Congleton, "but it is easier to solve problems like processing plant closings as a group through a cooperative."

■ The North American Bison Cooperative in New Rockford, ND, 380 bison-rancher members strong, processes and markets USDA-inspected bison meat in its new \$1.6 million processing plant. Europe is a growing market for bison meat. "The lesson of the 1980s is that you can't be just a producer if you want to remain in agriculture into the next century," says co-op director and bison rancher Doc Throlson. "If you do, you will produce yourself broke! Producers need to get more dollars from manufacturing and marketing."

■ Maine Potato Growers, Inc., in Presque Isle, ME, is a farmer-owned diversified agricultural supply and marketing cooperative that successfully markets seed potatoes, table stock potatoes, and small grains for the feed and brewing industry.

■ The Hiawatha Sustainable Woods Cooperative and Sustainable Woods Co-op in Wisconsin help farmers and other woodlot owners in several counties develop sustainable woodlot management plans, practice selective harvesting, and add value to their wood through cooperative processing and marketing. Using proper forest resource management practices, farmer members earn more from their wooded land than from traditional crops. "Farmers' best crop today may be their timber," says Jim Berkemeier, consulting forester to and founder of the Sustainable Woods Co-op.

■ A Minnesota banker, Randy Schwake, believes in the benefit to rural communities of bio-based products produced in value-added co-ops. "Farmers don't get enough credit for their business savvy. When they work together, they can accomplish great things," he says. He worked with 350 shareholders who invested in Al-Corn Clean Fuel Cooperative in Minnesota to process their corn into dried distillers grains and ethanol. The successful co-op helps members diversify their risk and produce a quality bio-based product.

Midwest. These co-op structures offer good financial returns for farmer-members. They have a closed or limited member policy and require larger contributions of "risk" or "equity" capital from members to transport, process, and market members' raw products into value-added products than do traditional limited equity co-ops.

Each share of common stock guarantees and obligates a member to deliver a set quantity of raw product to the co-op. While such ventures have risks like any business, many are quite successful for producers who are in a position to invest start-up capital. New generation co-op corn milling plants, pasta plants, and other ventures are appearing on the agricultural business scene.

In considering types of co-ops to join, some small farmers have resources to invest due to the product niche they occu-

py. Limited-resource growers have less capital to invest, so a different kind of co-op structure may work better for them. Traditional co-ops do not usually handle or process their members' raw products and usually require a nominal fee.

Legalities and Expertise Needed. Co-ops are corporations. To do business, co-ops must be formally incorporated under state statutes. Consult a lawyer with agricultural co-op experience and familiarity with your state's laws governing co-ops to advise and assist in developing legal documents needed, such as articles of incorporation, bylaws, and a membership application.

Hire a business consultant to do a feasibility study to assess business opportunities and potential obstacles. Develop a business plan. Consult a certified public accountant to set up financial aspects of the co-op, including - for agricultural

marketing co-ops - a marketing agreement to outline product delivery, sale, and payment terms.

Hire an experienced manager who can devote full time to running the co-op business. Many state governments offer grants and loans to assist start-up businesses with technical assistance and business planning.

Co-op Pros and Cons. A co-op is a democratically owned business, member-owner controlled through a democratically elected board of directors. Each member has one vote. A percentage of profits is applied to co-op administration. The balance is distributed equitably to members through patronage refunds on the basis of co-op use.

Co-ops offer members increased bargaining power in the marketplace by bargaining collectively with processors-buyers on behalf of grower-members for better prices and other trade terms. Co-

ops gain access to new markets and share costs of - and information about - new technology.

Value-added co-ops control processing steps and achieve greater product reliability, quality control, and volume. Members get a greater return for their products. Co-ops reduce risks associated with new business enterprises, keep jobs in rural communities, and strengthen the local tax base.

Not all agricultural situations lend themselves to the co-op solution, but many do. A co-op has risks like any business. Cash reserves for unforeseen emergencies are critical, especially during start-up or economic downturns. Producers need to understand what they are investing in. They need financing assistance and good management, especially with equity building and profit distribution to members.

Sometimes the democratic process slows down decision making until a consensus is reached. Communication and member education add costs. Access to capital is restricted, as investment is limited mainly to those who use the co-op's goods and services.

Success depends on many factors, including:

- having a good product and a clear purpose;
- doing a market analysis, feasibility study, and business plan;
- finding experienced business advisors, consultants, and a manager;
- having adequate financing for start-up, growth, and technical assistance after start-up;
- having links with other co-ops for supplies, marketing outlets, and joint ventures;
- having a financial commitment from members;
- having a dedicated board of directors with diverse experience; and
- maintaining good working relationships among members and with key co-op staff.

Your USDA Co-op Resource. The cooperative program of USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) is part of USDA's Rural Development mis-

sion area. It helps rural residents form new co-op businesses and improve existing operations.

The program conducts co-op-related research, produces a variety of co-op informational publications, and provides technical assistance, loans, and grants. Co-op development specialists and agricultural economists on staff provide a wide range of assistance for those interested in forming a co-op, from an initial feasibility study to a business plan and bylaws. Training for co-op directors is also available.

RBS staff work with co-op development specialists located at many of USDA's state rural development offices. USDA Rural Development provides technical assistance to existing co-ops experiencing specific problems and challenges. Call USDA/RBS at 202/720-7558 for co-op information, or write to USDA/RBS, Randall Torgerson, Stop 3250, Washington, DC 20250-3250 (or call 202/720-7558). ■

SFD Is ON THE WEB

To read *Small Farm Digest*, access <http://www.reeusda.gov/smallfarm>

OTHER CO-OP RESOURCES

CooperationWorks. Contact: Herb Cooper-Levy, Coordinator, 1401 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20005. Phone 202-383-5443. A network of co-op development centers and development partners providing technical assistance, government relations (including accessing public grants and loans), partnership building, and co-op learning services, development initiatives, and certification programs.

Currently eight outreach Centers for Cooperatives are based at land-grant universities and colleges to provide co-op information, education, research, and development. Nine new centers are starting in Alaska, South Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Kansas, Michigan, Montana, and Nebraska.

Cooperative Development Centers currently serving the U.S.:

■ **Arkansas** - Winrock International's Arkansas Rural Enterprise Center, 38 Winrock Drive, Morrilton, AR 72110; phone 501-727-5435 - ext. 229.

■ **Dakotas** - Dakotas Cooperative Development Center, North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives, PO Box 727, Mandan, ND 58554-0727; phone 701-663-6501.

■ **Mississippi** - Mississippi Association of Cooperatives/Center for Cooperative Development, PO Box 22786, Jackson, MS 39225-2786; phone 601-354-2750.

■ **Northeast** - Cooperative Life, 277 Federal St., Greenfield, MA 01304; phone 413-774-7599.

■ **Rocky Mountains** - Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Cooperative Development Center, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Foundation, 107800 East Bethany Drive, Aurora, CO 80014; phone 303-752-5800.

■ **Southeast** - Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, PO Box 95, Epes, AL 35460; phone 205-652-9676.

■ **Upper Midwest** - Cooperative Development Services, 30 W. Mifflin Street, Suite 401, Madison, WI 53703; phone 608-258-4396.

■ **Western** - Center for Cooperatives at the University of California, One Shields Drive, Davis, CA 95616; phone 530-752-2408.

Everett and Peggy Dobrinski

The Dakota Growers Pasta Company, a farmer-owned new generation co-op in Carrington, ND, has grown to be the third largest pasta producer in North America.

Durum wheat is grown by 1,100 members, who do all the processing steps and collectively receive nearly 70% of company profits in cash dividends. The co-op owns two pasta plants that employ 260 people in Carrington and 220 in Minneapolis, MN, to produce and package private-label pasta products for their co-op and other food companies.

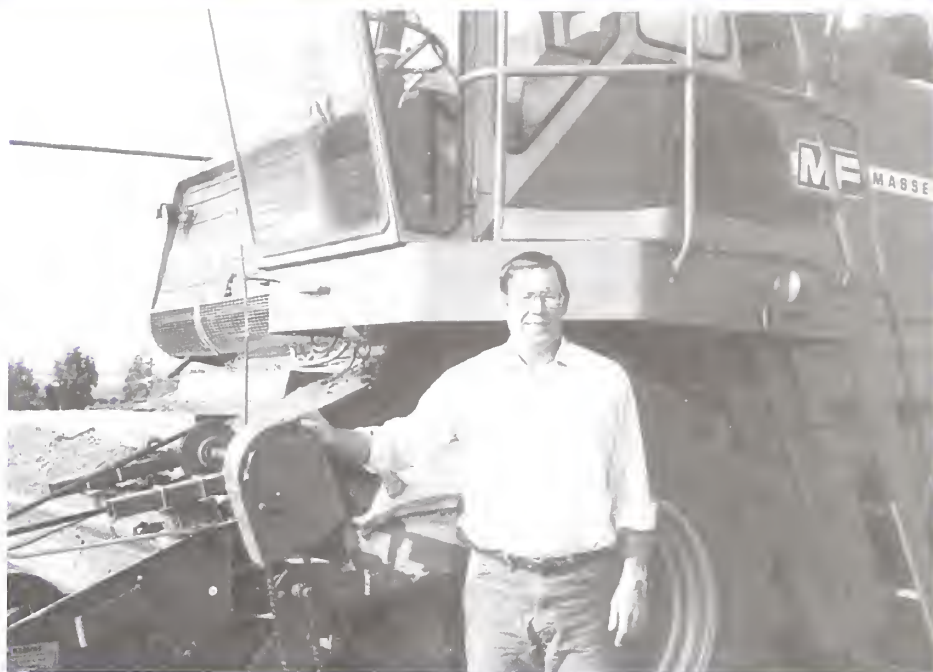
Small Farm Digest recently interviewed co-op member Everett Dobrinski, as he came in for dinner after winterizing his farm equipment. Everett and Peggy Dobrinski have been involved with the co-op as member-owners since it was first organized in 1992. Everett served on the interim board.

The Dobrinskis own and operate a small grain farm in Makoti in west central North Dakota. Their primary cash crop is durum wheat, but they also grow lentils, barley, canola, and crambe. "American farmers oversupply food so I devote a few acres to crops like crambe, an oil seed for industrial uses," says Dobrinski.

"Co-ops are essential to running our farm business. I do all my farm business through cooperatives. My inputs are purchased from a supplier co-op. I process my commodities into a value-added product and market the product through a co-op. Co-ops supply our phone and electricity. I obtain my credit from a cooperative farm credit association.

"Without co-ops, we would be sitting out here in the dark unable to communicate with the outside world. The traditional utility companies would not provide power to this sparsely settled area.

"I think a co-op is the best way of doing business for the small farmer. Being a co-op member gives me a chance to be a part of something bigger



Everett Dobrinski —PHOTO BY PEGGY DOBRINSKI.

and yet remain independent as a producer on my own land."

Asked why the Dakota Growers Pasta Company has been so successful, Dobrinski responded, "Cooperative organizers started out with a capable board. Two state legislators and farmers well known in their communities helped draw other farmers into co-op membership. We needed 1,000 members to raise enough capital to start.

"Bill Patrie, former North Dakota Economic Development Director, gave strong technical assistance as we developed our co-op organization. He urged us to get a feasibility study, and he handled day-to-day operations until our CEO was hired.

"Before the processing plant was built, a CEO who was well-known in the pasta industry was hired. He brought his reputation and two executives - an industrial engineer and a marketer - into the business. Before our plant was half built, we had commitments for half of what we proposed to produce."

Dobrinski says, "It takes an initial capital investment from farmer members who want to belong to a new generation co-op, versus the old-style co-op where just by doing business farmers became members without capital investment.

Not all small farmers are in a position to invest this much up-front."

Dobrinski noted that the size of the processing plant needed to process durum wheat is too big for any one small farmer to finance, along with its marketing aspect.

"North Dakota," Dobrinski explains, "is so rural and our population is so spread out that u-pick operations and other direct marketing strategies work just so far. The food we grow has to be taken somewhere else to sell. Our co-op adds value to our commodities and ships the resulting value-added product to wider markets outside this area.

"Value-added co-ops and food processing is the only way for a full-time small farmer in America to make it economically. Most small farmers do not earn enough to make ends meet without joining forces with other farmers in a co-op. The only way for small farmers to survive is to band together," says Dobrinski.

"The cooperative fits small farmers, for it is a proven form of business and small farmers can accomplish something together in the value-added area. Value-adding takes a lot of capital, but by banding together in a cooperative venture small farmers can help their individual revenues, fellow small farmers, and communities." ■

doing business."

She described the new USDA small farms policy (see CSREES Small Farm website www.reeusda.gov/smallfarm) as a departmental regulation that grows out of the National Commission on Small Farms' recommendations and commits the department to devoting greater efforts to small farms, ranches, and woodlots.

"This conference offers an opportunity for a tremendous exchange of ideas," said I. Miley Gonzalez, USDA's Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics. Gonzalez recently visited 26 states to see situations of small farmers first-hand. He also described a new Advisory Committee on Small Farms (see CSREES Small Farm website) that will advise the Secretary of Agriculture and the department on small farm matters.

"Producers serve on this advisory board," he reported. "We have made a major effort to address issues cited in A Time to Act: The Report of the National Commission on Small Farms. By working together, we can find solutions to problems that plague the small farm community."

The conference fulfilled some of the National Small Farm Commission's recommendations, specifically the need for land-grant colleges and universities, community-based organizations, foundations, and others to plan for more market development education and technical and production assistance to small farmers and ranchers. Direct farm-to-consumer markets, local value-added processing, and farmer-owned cooperatives were key topics.

The conference also stimulated closer partnerships between service providers to the small farm and ranch community among community-based organizations; land-grant university, federal, state, and local service providers; and farming and ranching community leaders.

More than 160 speakers - farmers, ranchers, community leaders, scientists, extension agents, administrators, and USDA personnel at all levels - represented a broad spectrum of ideas and exper-

tise in three plenary sessions and 35 breakout sessions.

Session content exposed attendees to diverse models of successful small farm and ranch activities. Models included on-farm research, small farm or ranch livestock alternatives, farmer-to-farmer networks, and collaboration building among land-grant institutions and local, state, and federal agencies.

Outcomes included plans to establish national and regional small farm databases and other networking formats to better exchange information about marketing strategies, value-added enterprises, meeting the needs of underserved clients, building institutional capacity to serve small farmers and ranchers, grant writing, business and entrepreneurial skills, and farmer-to-farmer and beginning farmer programs.

Speakers Dr. John Ikerd, University of Missouri, and Dr. Desmond Jolly, Vice-Chair, National Commission on Small Farms, identified corporate greed and the technology treadmill as major factors in America's agriculture crisis.

"The era of industrialization is over," proclaimed Ikerd. "We must sustain small farms or we cannot sustain humanity."

Speaking of the need to build sustainable communities and act with social and ecological responsibility in the practice of agriculture, he said: "True stewardship is going beyond self interests, acting responsibly for the thousands of generations to come, and making an investment for which there will be no earthly rewards."

Jolly delivered a strong wake-up call to Americans in his keynote address, A New Agriculture for the New Millennium. "We have strayed from the moral philosophy that founded this nation. We must rededicate ourselves to the great pillar of democracy on which this nation was founded - the freedom to own and farm land."

He called these times "one of the riskiest periods in American history because risk and debt are undermining our democracy. The technology that drives America's political, financial, and economic arenas is resulting in consoli-



Desmond Jolly — PHOTO BY SUSAN McCUE.

dations by large companies that control products in many sectors, including agriculture. This process is contributing to the loss of many American rights, including the right of small farms to exist."

Jolly said, "A remarkable diversity of competence from America's small farmers and ranchers shows me that America has the ability to reinvigorate our democracy and our agriculture."

"It will take the coordinated efforts of many - farmers and ranchers; federal, state, and local governments; land-grant universities; community-based organizations; and partners outside the agricultural community - to make this happen. Let's leave this conference and go out to change the world!"

The conference was sponsored by USDA agencies, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Farm Foundation, and EPA with key leadership provided from the USDA/CSREES National Program Leader for Small Farms, Denis Ebodaghe, and associate Nelson Escobar. Proceedings are available on the CSREES Small Farms website (www.reeusda.gov/smallfarm). The third National Small Farm Conference is scheduled for fall 2002. ■

A wide range of resources is available to assist small farmers and ranchers and their communities. Readers wishing further information about the resources listed below are asked to contact the individuals or offices listed for each item.



PRINT MEDIA

Making Your Small Farm Profitable.

A new book by Ron Macher, Editor, Small Farm Today Magazine, about direct marketing and value that puts more money in farmers' pockets. The book, aimed at beginning and experienced farmers, covers soil, balanced farm management, taking stock of your farm, products, and personal resources to maximize their use. Contains 25 pages of resources, three chapters on marketing, charts, and stories about successful small farmers. \$23.13 including s & h. Order from: Small Farm Today Magazine, 3903 West Ridge Trail Rd., Clark, MO 65243-9525 (or call 1-800-6332535).

North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks. A new resource to help adults match children's physical, mental, and



emotional abilities with agricultural job requirements. A project team from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico developed guidelines through a consensus development process. The guidelines were written in response to the statistic that more than 100 children are killed and 33,000 seriously injured each year as a result of accidents involving agricultural machinery, livestock, falls, or other causes. To order the guidelines, contact Gemplers, Inc., at 1-800-382-8473 or www.gemplers.com. For more information, contact the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety at 1-888-924-7233 or www.nagcat.org.

Putting Cooperation to Work by Brian Henehan, Brice Anderson, Timothy Pezzolesi, and Robert Campbell. A loose-leaf binder on developing a cooperative, featuring case studies, resources, and background material. Developed as support material for a videoconference,

this guide book has found wider use as a general resource. \$25. Also available is an edited video of the conference itself, about 2 hours, \$25. Handbook and video combined, \$45. Contact Brian Henehan at 607-255-8800, or e-mail to bmh5@cornell.edu.

Rural Cooperative Publications.

USDA publishes a bi-monthly magazine, Rural Cooperatives, that carries news and feature articles about agricultural marketing and rural utility cooperatives. To subscribe, call Dan Campbell, USDA/RBS, at 202720-6483. A free 64-page catalog lists more than 200 cooperative publications and videos available from USDA/RBS Cooperative Services. Titles range from basic cooperative primers, such as "Co-ops 101: An Introduction to Cooperatives," "What Is a Cooperative?" "How to Start a Cooperative," or "Creating Co-op Fever: A Rural Developer's Guide to Forming Cooperatives," to detailed accounts of much more technical subjects, such as the equity redemption program, income tax treatment for cooperatives, and video training modules for co-op directors. Includes an overview of USDA's Cooperative Services Program and a list of contacts at Cooperative Services. To order, contact Dan Campbell, USDA/RD, Stop 0705, 14th & Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250 (or call 202720-6483; fax: 202-690-4083; see www.rurdev.usda.gov).

A number of grant, loan, and training programs are available to support small farmers and their communities. Examples of such programs are summarized below. Readers wishing additional information are asked to contact the individuals or offices listed for each item.



GRANTS, LOANS, TRAINING

The rural business programs of USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) offer financing to a variety of organizations, including co-ops, rural business owners, non-profit organizations, public bodies, and Indian tribes. RBS' Business and Industry (B&I) Guaranteed Loan program can provide loans for up to \$10 million to finance new or expanded rural businesses and cooperatives. USDA guarantees loans obtained through a local lending institution.



Cooperative Stock Purchase Program

serves producers who want to join new cooperatives that produce value-added goods. Family farmers can use B&I loan guarantees to help pay for stock in a startup co-op that processes their agricultural commodity into a value-added product. Call RBS at 202-690-4730, or contact your USDA Rural Development state office.

The Rural Enterprise Grant Program

provides grants to organizations such as co-ops and small and emerging private businesses serving rural areas with populations of 25,000 or less. The Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program provides grants to public, non-profit organizations and institutions of higher learning serving rural areas with a population of

50,000. Grants can be used to establish and operate centers for co-op development. For grant information, contact your state USDA/Rural Development office listed in your telephone book blue pages, or call the national RBS office in Washington, DC at 202720-7558. For information about assistance available for co-ops, call USDA/RBS at 202720-7558, fax: 202-720-4541; email: coopinfo@ruraldev.usda.gov; or website: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.

USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program offers grants to eligible applicants in four regions (Northeast, North Central, Southern, and Western).

North Central Region SARE Program (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI) will call for producer grant proposals on February 1, 2000. Farmers and ranchers interested in exploring sustainable agriculture are encouraged to apply. Grant proposals are due April 28, 2000. For applications and information, contact: NCR SARE, University of Nebraska, 13A Activities Bldg., PO Box 830840, Lincoln, NE 68583-0840, or call 402-4727081, or e-mail ncr-sare@unl.edu. Applications are also available at www.sare.org/ncrsare.

UPCOMING

EVENTS

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	CONTACT
March 1-2	<i>United We Grow: A Working Conference for Small-Scale Vegetable and Fruit Cooperatives in the Northeast</i>	Bethel, PA	Julie Meyer - 413-665-7725
March 7-9	<i>Farming and Ranching for Profit, Stewardship, and Community Conference</i>	Portland, OR	Gina Hashagen - 541-737-5477 or email: hashageg@bcc.orst.edu
March 15- May 10	<i>Small Farm Series: Beginning and Successful Small Farm Operations</i>	Frederick, MD	Terry Poole - 301-631-3577
March 19-25	<i>North Carolina A&T Small Farm Week</i>	Greensboro, NC	Dan Lyons - 336-334-7734
April 11-13	<i>Agricultural Marketing Outreach Workshop #2: The Marketing Challenge</i>	Memphis, TN	Carl Butler - 304-766-4163 email: butlerct@mail.wvsc.edu

See Small Farm website (www.reeusda.gov/smallfarm) for the most up-to-date listing of events. We welcome submissions of events from our subscribers that would be of interest to the small farm community so that our Upcoming Events listing reflects a diversity of events from all regions of the country. Please send

submissions to Stephanie Olson, Editor, *Small Farm Digest*, CSREES, USDA, Mail Stop 2220, 1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250-2220 (phone: 202/401-6544; fax: 202/401-5179; e-mail: solson@reeusda.gov).

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